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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 000317

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [FAIR](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: TSA INSPECTS GHANA AIRWAYS AFTER 6 CANCELLED
FLIGHTS

REF: ACCRA 139

Classified By: EconChief Chris Landberg for Reason 1.5 (d)

1. (SBU) Summary: Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officials came to inspect flight security operations procedures at Ghana Airways (GA) because of the recent incident regarding a banned co-pilot. After enduring six flight cancellations, TSA Officials were able to finally inspect a Ghana Airways flight on Tuesday February 10. While concerned with some procedural and communications inconsistencies, TSA was comfortable enough with GA procedures to leave. The only concern by TSA now is the sustainability of the procedures. Post believes Ghana Airways permission to operate to and from the U.S. is worthy of further scrutiny. End summary.

Background

2. (U) Three Transportation Security Administration officials visited Accra from February 3-10 expecting to evaluate at least three Ghana Airways flights to the U.S. In light of the recent banning of a Ghana Airways co-pilot who had flown to the U.S. after his name appeared on a No Fly list, TSA officials came to Ghana to address what it saw as gaps in the level of security scrutiny to which Ghana Airways subjected its passengers. (Reftel)

Initial Meeting with Ghana Air CEO Owusu, Not Good

3. (SBU) Econoff accompanied TSA officials to an initial meeting with Ghana Airways (GA) CEO Phillip Owusu on February 4. Cordial and straightforward, TSA officials explained their expectations of the evaluation--to witness GA preparation for and departure to U.S. airspace, including check in, ground security, aircraft search, ground safety and secondary search procedures. TSA officials explained that every airline operating to and from the U.S. is required to implement all Emergency Amendments (EAs) sent out by the TSA. Ghana Airways was under scrutiny due to its inconsistent communications with TSA regarding EAs and the banning of a Ghana Airways co-pilot from flying to U.S. airspace (a reflection of Ghana Airways disregard of operating procedures). TSA reps asked for assurances that the Acting Head of Security Dennis Bassaku could be reached on a 24-hour basis, necessitating a mobile phone and consistent computer access at his office. Owusu assured TSA that these things would be provided, but that is where his cordiality ended.

4. (C) Owusu used the occasion to express his frustration at the way the banned co-pilot, who was arrested and taken to a holding facility in Maryland, was treated in the U.S. He further accused the U.S. Embassy and the TSA of being remiss in not notifying him personally that the co-pilot was banned from U.S. airspace. Larbi tried to explain that the pilot flew to the U.S. after appearing on the No Fly List that Ghana Airways itself must vet and cross check before its flights leave for the U.S. Larbi explained further that the pilot's prolonged detention was a surprise to him, but TSA has no control over what happens to a person who appears on the No Fly List and subsequently flies to the U.S. Owusu continued to insist that U.S. authorities were remiss in their duties, not Ghana Airways and that he would continue to pursue diplomatic action.

A Tragedy of Errors

5. (U) The inspection team, expecting to begin work the night of their February 3 arrival, was thwarted by a technical difficulty that left the Ghana Airways flight grounded in Baltimore. The next opportunity to inspect a flight was to be the night of February 4, but again, technical difficulties prevented the flight from arriving to Accra and the outbound flight to the U.S. was cancelled. Four more last-minute flight cancellations left TSA wondering whether Ghana Airways was trying to prevent inspection. During their inspection of

preparations for one of the cancelled flights, TSA was encouraged that GA security authorities had the correct No Fly and Selectee lists. However, they were discouraged by the improper procedures for vetting the list and the absence of six EAs for which GA Security Chief Bassaku had previously acknowledged receipt and implementation. Non-compliant airlines can be penalized USD 11,000 per passenger per flight for not following all security regulations. The inspectors noted that given what they had seen, they would have sent their concerns to their superiors in Brussels and Washington. Throughout the drama, airline authorities did not notify TSA of planned and unplanned flight schedules, instead TSA had to call GA operations workers to get this information.

Final Meeting with Ghana Airways CEO and Inspection

16. (C) Frustrated by what they saw, TSA met with the DCM and Econoff on February 10 to explain their message to GA CEO Owusu and to consider the consequences of GA's non-compliance and the cancellation of every flight they were to inspect. Econoff accompanied TSA to meet Owusu for a second time. The inspectors told Owusu that they must inspect a flight operation to the U.S., GA must improve its system of vetting the No Fly and Selectee lists and Security Chief Bassaku must have 24-hour contact capability (including a cell phone and internet capability). In a far less combative mood than our previous visit, Owusu assured TSA officials that they would see a complete flight operation (wheels up) that day. He also admitted that Ghana Airways financial difficulties had crippled operations. The officials were able to observe a full operation to the U.S. February 10. There were only some minor procedural issues that concerned them. Airline security employees seemed to grasp what they needed to do to ensure compliance. TSA's only concern was what would happen after they left. They wanted some assurance of sustainability in a compliance program for GA and are going to communicate more frequently with Security Chief Bassaku.

Comment

17. (SBU) After a number of tries, GA security officials sort of got it right. However, TSA concerns about sustainability of compliance procedures are well taken. GA's cash-strapped status undermines GA's ability to operate flights to and from the United States. Owusu has again made a plea to Italian officials (this time religious officials) to intervene on Ghana Airways behalf to "reschedule" the 25 million dollar debt owed to Alitalia that prevents Ghana Airways planes from being serviced. After 40 plus years in the International Air Transport Association (IATA), Ghana Airways was kicked out in 2002. The GoG, while forcing GA to continue to operate, has done little to financially support its operations. TSA officials explained that security (handled by them in DHS) and safety (handled by FAA) have been operationally separated. At some point, the FAA should make a decision on when an airline's financial status prevents it from complying with safety regulations for flights into the U.S. If past performance on security and operations activities are any indication, Ghana Airways is an airline deserving of further scrutiny. End Comment.
Yates